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ABSTRACT

Part of a wider study of English teaching in the two-year college, this workshop report covers four main areas: students, curriculum, faculty, and methods of instruction. The first section profiles today's student, emphasizing how he or she has changed from past students, reports corresponding changes in two-year college education, discusses implications for the future, suggests several subjects for future research, and summarizes perspectives for the future. The second section describes the influences that have caused changes in the curriculum at two-year colleges, including economic restrictions, student diversity, and instructor pressures. This section also describes the positive and negative implications on the future of the English profession of these changes and lists the areas in which research data are needed to support curriculum changes. The third section examines teacher preparation, involvement in professional organizations, esteem, and role in governance and politics. It also lists areas of concern and suggests ways instructors may affect the future status of the discipline. The fourth section reviews changes in instructional methods over the past decade, details the results of these changes, discusses implications for the future, and stresses the need for research in several areas. The conclusion summarizes all the changes that have taken place. (JL)

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Final Report

ED222903

A REPORT ON THE NTCC STATUS STUDY WORKSHOP ON ENGLISH IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

sponsored by the National Two-Year College Committee

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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BACKGROUND

This workshop was part of a continuing study of the State of the Art of teaching English in the two-year college, a study which began with the 1975 St. Louis Seminar and the 1976-77 Regional Workshops. All these conferences were based on or were in response to the 1965 Tempe Report and the Kroeger-Weingarten Report.

On November 20, 1979, the National Two-Year College Committee (NTCC), a standing committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), sponsored a one-day invitational conference of two-year college English instructors at the St. Francis Hotel, San Francisco.

Thirty English instructors from twenty states (and Canada) met during the seven-hour conference to discuss their impressions of the current status of English in the two-year colleges of our nation. Each participant had been asked to respond thoughtfully to a list of questions concerning four main areas of their profession: the student, curriculum, faculty, and the methods of instruction in the two-year colleges in their regions of the country.

During the four main sessions of the conference, participants discussed openly and candidly their opinions of the present status of these areas. These opinions were recorded by two members of the NTCC and subsequently synthesized into the essays which form the body of this report. While the success of the conference was due to the efforts and professionalism of all its participants, the NTCC would like to express special appreciation to Sylvia A. Holladay and Roger D. Easom for their astute and alert recording of our verbal exploration of the topics. A complete list of participants is attached at the end of this report.

I. OBSERVATIONS ON THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENT:

The student is the essential factor in the two-year college; the curriculum, the instructional methods, and the faculty follow in importance. Undisputably, today's student differs from the student of ten years ago. Because of these differences, we need changes in curriculum, instruction, and in faculty attitudes.

PROFILE OF TODAY'S STUDENT

Today's two-year college student body is still a diverse group, varying in age, interest, background, and ability. It still includes many minority students and many non-traditional students. However, it is different from the student body ten years ago. Today's students are older; the average age is now twenty-nine or thirty instead of twenty-five. More of these students, especially those older, are female. Fewer are veterans. More students have more financial, personal, and family responsibilities and problems than those fo the sixtie More work, go to school part-time, and pursue education under adverse conditions. These students often carry more credit hours than they can successfully complete. More handicapped students (blind,deaf, paraplegic, learning disabled) attend two-year colleges, hoping (and some cases demanding) to be treated the same as all other students and compete with equal success. More international and bilingual students now need English as a second language instruction. Because of these pressures, today's students may receive little pleasure from learning and realize little success.

Today's students seem better motivated, but less verbal than those of the sixties. Because they are older, more realistic, and more pragmatic, they are aware of their inadequate academic preparation and realize the need for mastery of basic communication skills for substantial employment. They recognize their lack of reading, writing, and thinking abilities; they realize their need for a comprehensive liberal education, not just training in skills. They are generally motivated for self-improvement, both in individual growth and career preparation. Support from other disciplines, feedback from industry and business, and changes in societal values have all contributed to this change in student attitude. Thus, students now seem more receptive to (and possible more enthusiastic for) what English departments offer. Perhaps this change is merely "different" and not really "better"; perhaps today's students expect accomplishment and reward (instant success) without work. If so, today's students lack the personal values of integrity and pride in their work. Nevertheless, these students are more consumer-oriented, more demanding, more outspoken, and more likely to express grievances when they are disillusioned because of unfulfilled expectations.

Definitely today's students are less verbal than yesterday's. They are less competent in the manipulation of the language system--grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence construction, diction etc. They are less able to analyze and synthesize ideas and less able to compose clearly and effectively. Their reading levels are low; in fact, many two-year college students apparently have seventh-grade (some even fifth-grade) reading levels. Because of this lack of verbal ability, students often lack familiarity with and interest in the literature of our Western heritage. Ironically, because they are more egocentric and more content-oriented, they are more able and willing to reveal themselves personally and thus are more interested in contemporary literature of self-inquiry and testimonial.

RESULTING CHANGES IN ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

Because of changes in students in the last decade, corresponding changes (both good and bad) have occurred in two-year college education. For one, some educators in other departments (especially those involving career programs) are less cooperative with English departments than they once were. Frequently they feel basic skills instruction should be taken out of English departments and assumed by non-English educated instructors. Examples are business teachers or engineering teachers teaching writing and counselors determining assessment instruments for reading and language skill proficiency. Moreover, industry is beginning to assume the role of communications instructor. Management often claims that English educators are not doing the job necessary for the market place, so industrial and management training personnel will. Their approach is entirely pragmatic, not humanistic. A third change has been the splintering of English within its own academe; in many schools, speech, reading, humanities, developmental programs, and testing are no longer taught or controlled by the English instructors themselves. Snugly isolated in our ivory towers of literary tradition and elitism, we have allowed (perhaps even encouraged) other forces to take over many facets of the proper work of English departments and, thus, have decreased the influence of the English disipline in education. A final change reflecting the changes in students is the increase in proficiency exams. Today that figure has tripled, and several states (California and Florida) have mandated statewide competency exams in both reading and writing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The implications for future change in our profession suggested by these needs and demands from today's two-year college student are numerous. To maintain the viability of English in our colleges, we must respond to these changes.

First, the two-year college must establish its difinition of itself. The last decade has been a period of growth, but we still have an identity crisis with which to cope. We, as English faculty, must clarify our role and our value in the educational hierarchy. We must recognize and help others to understand the difference between mastering functional competencies and becoming a fully educated person. We must also accept and stress the interrelationship of all communication skills (reading, writing, thinking, listening, speaking, and viewing), especially the symbiotic relationship of reading and writing. Thus, we will open the doors to our English classrooms and gladly teach reading, speech, technical writing, business writing, medical vocabulary, listening, developmental courses, continuing education courses, and virtually any other aspect of the broad field of communications in a community two-year college.

We must also adjust our attitudes, our curriculum, and our teaching methods to the students of tomorrow, typically those with high expectations but little knowledge and few skills. These students will require increased patience and understanding, along with new appraaches and innovative methods of instruction to help them attain the high levels of performance which they, we, and society set for them. We must adjust our teaching to their learning styles, not to our own preferences; we must make our curriculum student-oriented or teacher-oriented; we must determine and then offer the courses essential to maximum performance, both for students as workers and as individual human beings in future society. We must reject the traditional patterns of scheduling and movement through higher education; instead, we must offer more flexibility in scheduling. Third, we must work with the community outside the institution. We can evaluate and restructure our English curriculum so that it is both humanistic and pragmatic;

then we can make this fusion known to business, industry, and governmental agencies. There is no real need for each to duplicate communication programs. We can also expand our continuing education, non-credit offerings in English to reach a larger segment of our community.

SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

These changes in the two-year college student population suggest several subjects for future serious research and investigation:

(1) regional differences in the relationship between oral skills and writing skills,

(2) successful English curriculum models for two-year college students,

(3) reasons today's students are less verbal and more egocentric than those of a decade ago,

(4) the hidden literary issue: intellectual development after forty,

(5) effects of media upon student's cognitive precesses,

(6) the effect of older students on English in the two-year college,

(7) realism versus "college-level" education: how to cope with both,

(8) the integration of occupational and humanistic goals in English offerings,

(9) how attitude affects learning in English courses, and

(10) planning for lifelong learners in communication.

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

The two-year college will continue to be an egalitarian, non-traditional academic environment. In the future, it can become an even more community-oriented institution for life-long learning and enjoyment for all people in the

community. English in the two-year college offers a challange. If we accept a rigid model, we will be exclusive and wither; if we accept a flexible model, we can be inclusive and flourish, The decision is ours to affect.

II. OBSERVATIONS ON THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE CURRICULUM:

Changes in the two-year college curriculum during the past decade appear to stem from various influences: economic restrictions, an increasingly diverse student population, and pressures to become more pragmatic from both internal and external sources.

ECONOMIC RESTRICTIONS

With supplus funds disappearing and budgets shrinking, two-year colleges have been forced to employ fiscal restraints, some of which are innovative. Such innovation in curriculum has resulted in non-traditional modes of dollar-stretching. For example, mini-courses and even mini-semesters enable schools to accomodate more students, thereby increasing funding based on FTE enrollment. Many institutions are reaching into their communities to serve personnel in business, industry, and government; this effort will not only strengthen enrollment, but simultaneously may encourage grassroot political support for future funding. Interest in the non-traditional student has led to expanded offerings in community education/non-credit courses. Funding available through special programs and federal grants has spurred the expansion of course offerings in developmental education and its components such as reading/writing laboratories, which at some institutions are elaborately equipped with locally and commercially produced software and expensive hardware.

Economic restrictions have in some areas also reduced the development of literature/humanities/language courses in favor of basic skills courses. In some states, the number of required courses has been reduced; yet in most states, writing courses remain the strongest component of the two-year college curriculum. Fiscal restraints have influenced the overall development of the curriculum toward conservatism with renewed emphasis on standards and quality, particularly regarding writing courses. Terms like "traditional" and "basic"

are reappearing with frequency in course descriptions. In a few states, instructors are having to work under legislative mandates that affect curriculum formation. These economic influences on curricula must be studied further to determine the extent to which their consequences are desirable and productive.

STUDENT DIVERSITY

The flexibility required to serve a diverse student population has spurred numerous changes in curriculum. Today's students, older and more career-oriented than their predecessors of a decade ago, insist on a more pragmatic approach to their education. Their demand for career-oriented courses is echoed by their employers as well. Hence, there has been a proliferation of courses for vocational-technical students. These students, particularly those in career-oriented colleges such as technical institutes, expect career-oriented courses like Business English and Technical Writing to substitute for the traditional freshman English requirements.

Still other changes have resulted from institutions opening their doors to non-traditional students. Open-door policies, granting the opportunity for higher education to all citizens of extremely divergent backgrounds and academic ability, have contributed to sizable growth in some institutions in areas where higher education was not previouly available. Entrance tests indicate an alarming increase in the number of students who are deficient in reading and writing skills, thus requiring colleges to offer developmental courses for their remediation to perform college-level work. And since many of these students with serious learning deficiencies do not aspire to continue their formal education beyond the level of the two-year college, they have populated various certificate/associate degree curricula described as "terminal programs." There is sufficient concern, and in some cases alarm, among two-year college educators that traditional two-year colleges are being phased into

vocational-technical schools offering basically a career-oriented curriculum with very few, and increasingly fewer, general education courses. Such developments must be carefully monitored and studied.

PRESSURES

Changes in the two-year college curriculum are not, however, made at the exclusive direction of the budget makers or students. Increasingly instructors are helping to shape the curriculum. Their influence on and off campus is determined by their effective participation in collective bargaining, by their participation in and contribution to interdisciplinary programs, by their renewed commitment to qualify instruction, and by their increasing visibility in professional associations. Through careful prunning of the curriculum and developing competency testing, instructors are demonstrating a keener awareness of the needs and demands of their students.

POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS

The changes affecting curriculum in the two-year college have both positive and negative implications on the future of the English profession. In a positive sense, instructors must remain active in their professional development and in the development of curriculum. They must be flexible and sensitive to student needs in a rapidly advancing technocracy. In addition, they must uphold standardsof quality in a climate of economic and political pressure brought on by outside forces, such as state legislatures and funding agencies, as well as pressures from within by their administrators who must count heads and maintain accountability. Upholding quality forces instructors to refine more carefully their successes and failures in time to make a difference in student retention and performance and in possible funding. Achieving higher standards requires faculty upgrading through hiring qualified writing teachers and insisting that teacher-training programs be available which address the needs of the two-year

college faculty. Perhaps one of the most dynamic areas of two-year college education--the faculty who elect to teach in this area of higher education--must be formally studied to determine their present profile and status.

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Numerous problems have been brought about by the changes affecting curriculum. Some instructors are not able to cope with the increasing demand to be flexible, to stand the test of accountability, and/or to tolerate what appears to be a "watering down" of the curriculum to serve academically-deficient students at the expense of honors programs and humanistic education in general. A thirteen percent reduction in literature courses has been experienced nationwide during the last decade. Today's curriculum appears to offer students fewer intellectual and creative pursuits, thus narrowing the traditional liberal arts base for further education in four-year institutions. Teacher frustration is also fueled by increased bureaucracy and recordkeeping; by the standardization of teaching and behavioral objectifying of courses with a consequent emphasis on minutiae; and by the proliferation of career-oriented courses which tend to frighten and intimidate many of the traditionally-trained English instructors in our profession.

FEATURES NEEDING STUDY

What is needed, many instructors in two-year colleges say, is concrete research data to support curriculum changes. Formal studies are needed in these areas especially: testing, matriculation, accountability, course placement, legislative impact, career preparation and placement, humanistic education, preparation for writing, methods of teaching composition, application of learning technology, effectiveness of programs, courses, and approaches (e.g. developmental studies, humanities, and writing laboratories), and "real" issues in teaching English in the two-year college.

NEW FRONTIERS

The future of English teaching in the two-year college will be determined by the response given to the pressures of funding agents/agencies, to the trend toward career-oriented education, to the application of developmental studies, to the demands of accountability and testing, and to the requirements of the non-traditional student.

III. OBSERVATIONS ON THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE FACULTY TODAY

Generally, today's two-year college instructor ranks higher than his predecessor of a decade ago in these respects: teacher preparation, professional involvement, esteem, politics, and governance.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Teacher quality among full-time faculty seems generally improved for several reasons. Since most candidates for replacement and new positions have advanced degrees, the two-year colleges appear to reap benefits. Most two-year college faculties have become well established in the past decade; therefore, the very few positions that are available are filled by the most qualified of numerous applicants. Futhermore, the demand to be flexible and aggressive has discouraged some of the less qualified faculty. The traditional lack of emphasis on research and publication (required for tenure and promotion at most four-year colleges) seems to encourage a faculty more committed to teaching alone; hence, they are also more willing to seek advanced teacher training when and where the opportunity is available. Many faculties are aided in their professional development by departments or programs within their own colleges specifically addressing faculty needs; a few faculty benefit from liberal travel allowances for attending professional meetings. A large number of faculty seen to attend worthwhile professional conferences at their expense.

PROFESSIONAL INVOLVMENT

Despite travel restrictions brought on by fiscal restraints, two-year college instructors seem to be participating in professional organizations, many of which are reporting increased attendance. Six regional conferences under the auspices of the National Council of Teachers of English and the

Conference on College Composition and Communication have annual conventions that offer professionally-enriching sessions featuring national and local speakers, panels, dialogue, and discussions of issues affecting English teaching at the college level. Recently more two-year college personnel have attained key leadership positions in the major national and regional meetings; this trend indicates today's faculties' deep concern for the future status of their discipline and their growing regard by four-year college and university participants who traditionally control such meetings.

ESTEEM

Increased faculty stability, preparation, and a concern for quality, standards, and the future of their discipline have all created more respect for English faculty on today's campuses. Instructors are vocal about the needs of their discipline in serving the non-traditional student. They firmly oppose class overloading and other adverse conditions that reduce the quality of instruction. Their firm voices are being heard at the local, state, and national levels.

GOVERNANCE AND POLITICS

As a result of an active response to issues, teachers in today's two-year colleges seem more involved in the governance and politics of their institutions than were their predecessors. They serve on key committees and join both their colleagues in other disciplines and those from other colleges in learning the power of their political clout attained through exemplary professionsl conduct.

AREAS OF CONCERN

The following obstacles, however, appear to hinder progress: stagnation and burn-out caused by decreasing turnover among the more stable faculties along with intensely demanding positions, low morale in some cases where

institutions insist on administering ineffective student and instructor evaluations, increasing use of part-time or supplementary instructors for the sake of economy and/or anticipated retrenchment, and budgetary stresses of a general nature which restrict the college's growth and development.

These problems need to be researched and documented. Other areas recommended for study include the adverse effects of legislation on teacher morale; current modes of instruction and testing (especially those used for the sake of economy); lack of cross-disciplinary attention to writing skills; inadequacies in teacher preparation programs; the use of regional and national professional organizations; ways to measure faculty development as a basis for tenure, promotion and/or retention; and the current faculty evaluation procedures.

FUTURE STATUS OF THE DISCIPLINE

The future of English teaching may be determined by the two-year college instructors' success in selling other disciplines and the public on the importance of written communication and in promoting literacy across the curriculum. Instructors may further enhance the status of the discipline by maintaining key campus-wide committee assignments; by researching, writing and publishing; by participating in local, regional, and national professional orgainzations; by upgrading and renewing methods and theories; by exercising political clout; and by remaining aware of community needs and working actively to meet them.

IV. OBSERVATIONS ON INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS IN TWO-YEAR COLLEGE ENGLISH

Two-year colleges have been the leaders in effecting innovative instructional methods in the teaching of English. Today, university faculties are looking increasingly to two-year college faculty for information on how to teach today's students, especially how to teach writing to inadequately prepared students. However, we should consider several questions: Are we as innovative today as we have been in the past? Have our past innovations been successful? What further instructional innovations are needed for the future?

CHANGES IN INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

The past decade has been a period of change in instructional methods for English at all educational levels, but especially at the two-year college level. Lectures and programmed materials are used less; modular materials and audio-visual aids appear to be used more. The dominant innovations have been conferencing, self-pacing, individualizing, small group interaction, and computer-assisted instruction. Students themselves have been effectively utilized as peer tutors, evaluators, and editors. The major trend has been toward supplementing classroom instruction through writing laboratories, tutors, paraprofessionals, and television; in some situations, labs and TV courses have supplanted the traditional "live" classroom. These changes reflect the movement toward more hardware, fewer instructors, and potentially less personalized instruction.

The causes of these instructional innovations are numerous. Among the most important are the changes in two-year college students, especially the increase in low achievers and those with poor learning skills. The emphasis upon career education, the increase in outreach classes off-campus, attempts

to assist inadequately-prepared instructors, and attempts to cope with increasing loads have also led to the development of some of these methods. Accompanying these changes has been the insistence upon back-to-the-basics, upon behavorial objectives, upon competency-based education, and upon educational accountability, along with the renewed interest in testing, usually objective testing. Frustration with traditional methods and development of new technology at relatively low costs have further contributed to the changes in methodology.

RESULTS OF THESE CHANGES

Some of these approaches and the expanded use of objective tests as tools of evaluation tend to reduce the teaching of English to a series of separable, mechanistic procedures, for both the instructor and the students. Such changes may be in the direction of the trivial. They may shift curricular focus to only certain kinds of teaching/learning memorizing, rote learning, isolating skills, learning the factual and the quantifiable at the expense of the interpretive and the qualitative. This direction is harmful in the teaching of literature as well as composition. Students need to learn how to read, enjoy, interpret, analyze, and evaluate literature, not to memorize lines and facts. Similarly students in writing courses need to learn to perceive accurately, to observe closely, to think clearly, to express coherently, not just to write with mechanical precision and correctness. "Back to Basics" must be defined to mean not only back to facts and prescriptive approaches, but back to the study of basic processes--of how the mind works and how language works and reflects the mental processes.

INSTRUCTION IN THE FUTURE

In the future, we must be sure we do not innovate merely for the sake of change; we must employ a combination of instructional methods in order to insure

personalized instruction for our diverse students; we must insure that qualified English instructors control instruction in English language skills and the composing process, including statements of competencies, pre- and post-assessment instruments, reading and writing labs, learning skills centers, developmental education programs, and English as a second language instruction; and we must do all we can to protect ourselves, especially composition instructors, from overload and burnout.

NEED FOR RESEARCH

These trends in instructional methodology suggest several areas for further study as they relate to English in the two-year college:

(1) the instructional potential of teaching 100-150 students on an individual/personalized basis,

(2) the teacher or the method: which makes the real difference in effecting student learning,

(3) the effectiveness of the write-rewrite method of developing writing competence,

(4) the relationship of reading skill to writing skill, and how they reinforce each other,

(5) the capability of matching individual learning styles to individual teaching techniques,

(6) the validity of peer evaluation in composition,

(7) the instruction of students in responding to and constructively evaluating the writing of their peers,

(8) the creation of more adequate measurements for student work, for courses, and for curriculum,

(9) the preparation of two-year college English instructors, especially in the teaching of writing,

(10) the uses of computer-assisted instruction in composition.

Some changes observed in English instruction in the two-year college may be negative and discouraging;still, this dynamic situation can also be exciting and challenging. Only through research and further study can we assure continued instructional innovation of a reliable nature.

CONCLUSIONS

This NTCC study indicates that in the last decade English in the two-year college has changed: 1) today's students are increasingly diverse; 2) the curriculum has become more flexible; 3) faculty members are better prepared and more active; 4) widespread innovations in instructional methods have resulted from the changes in students, curriculum, and faculty. The two-year college may become more pragmatically narrow, or it may become even more humanistically responsive to the total community. The future of English in the two-year college depends upon how we respond to change.

As a group committed to strengthening English in the two-year college, the NTCC appreciated the opportunity provided by the National Council of Teachers of English to sponsor this invitational conference. We feel the knowledge gained provided considerable insight into our area of the profession and its current status. We, however, recognize that the information obtained through the conference is limited to the opinions and insights of those participating; it is not intended to represent or to replace a scientifically-valid study of the topic. A major conclusion we reached, however, and one which is unquestionably valid, is that a thorough study is imperative. No such study has been conducted in over ten years. Continuing in its efforts to support both the two-year college concept and the instruction of English within this area of higher education, the NTCC will attempt to obtain the necessary funding to conduct such a study in the near future. We are confident of our success in this project, and appreciative of the continued support of two-year college educators across the country.

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